

TECHWOOD HOMES, STORE
AND ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
Olympic Housing Impact Area
114-138 Merritts Avenue
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2257-A

HABS
GA
61-ATLA,
COA-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TECHWOOD HOMES, STORE AND ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

HABS No. GA-2257-A

Location:

114-138 Merritts Avenue, N. W.
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

U.S.G.S. Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

Northing 3739/560, Easting 741/600

Present Owner:

Atlanta Housing Authority
739 West Peachtree
Atlanta, Georgia 30365

Present Occupant:

Multiple occupants

Present Use:

Public housing administrative offices, clinic, store, storage, workshop
Part of Olympic Housing Impact Area
To be demolished

Significance:

Techwood Homes, Store and Administration Building is a contributing building in the Techwood Homes Historic District, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. The building is significant for its role within the first federally funded public housing project in this country. In addition to its engineering and construction techniques, its economic, social, and governing functions were central to the concept of a self-contained community that was one of the goals of the Techwood Homes public housing experiment.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1934-1936. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated Techwood on November 29, 1935. September 1, 1936 marked the official opening ceremony of the project and was proclaimed Techwood Day in Atlanta. No information has been found confirming the exact erection date of the Store and Administration Building.
2. Architect: Burge and Stevens. The Atlanta architectural firm accepted an \$84,000 contract to design the Techwood Homes complex, of which the Store and Administration Building was a part, on May 17, 1934. Flip Burge, one of the principals, was an original member of the Board of Trustees which secured federal approval for the Techwood project.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA) of the federal government had original jurisdiction over Techwood Homes. When the Federal Housing Administration was established in 1937, that agency assumed control of the project. The Atlanta Housing Authority was created in June of 1938, under the directorship of Charles F. Palmer, Atlanta real estate developer who had spearheaded the drive to make Techwood the first public housing project in the country. In March of 1940, the Atlanta Housing Authority took over administration of Techwood Homes under a lease agreement with the U. S. Housing Authority.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: J. A. Jones Construction Company of Charlotte, North Carolina built Techwood Homes, including the Store and Administration Building, at a total cost of \$2,108,337, which included purchase of the land at 49 cents a square foot. No specific information on the Store and Administration Building's individual cost, contractor or suppliers has been located, although the construction project resulted in many local jobs.
5. Original plans and construction: The building remains a primarily one-story concrete structure - with the exception of its east end which contains a second story. The building stair-steps down the grade to the west, toward Techwood Drive. Original plans are housed in the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority.
6. Alterations and additions: It is believed that the building received its first physical alterations in 1955. James C. Wise is believed to have renovated the building, enclosing what had originally been open-bay store fronts.

An Atlanta Housing Authority site plan from 1962 records a possible change in use, which may have altered the structural configuration of the original store areas. The

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plan shows a "tenant selection office" in the westernmost end of the building and a "maintenance shop" at the other end of the building, west of the "rental office."

It is possible, although unconfirmed, that bathrooms were upgraded in the Store and Administration Building in the 1980's, as they were in the residential units. Changes in floor covering and paint may also have been made at this time.

B. Historical Context

The relationship of the Store and Administration Building to the rest of the Techwood Homes complex was a central one. As an experiment in public housing as a self-sustainable community, Techwood relied on the economic, social, governing functions represented in the Store and Administration Building.

The Techwood Progress, published by and for Techwood residents, in its February 23, 1938 issue, carries the advertisements of several stores which were located in this building. They include Alverson's Beauty and Barber Shop (120 Merritts Avenue, N. W.) which boasted of its "New Eugene Permanent Waving Machine" and its 25 cent children's haircuts, "except Saturdays"; May's (124 Merritts Avenue, N. W.) a laundry and dry cleaning business that offered 3 for \$1 on dry cleaning of "plain dresses, men's suits, coats (no fur), and overcoats"; Hillman's Market (126 Merritts Avenue, N. W.) which advertised "Staple and Fancy Groceries and Fresh Western Meats"; and Baldwin's Drug Store (136 Merritts Avenue, N. W.) which featured "complete fountain service and Wood's fine ice cream." They also delivered.

It is believed that a portion of the second floor Techwood Homes manager's office served as the site of one of the 11 nationwide War Nursery Schools opened to assist mothers with defense jobs during World War II. Thirty-three children were enrolled from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM for \$1.25 a week per child.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Of architectural interest are the building's narrow transverse dimension and the exterior use of materials, which the National Register nomination describes as "4 inches of selected common brick, bonded every fifth course" and trimmed with cast stone. While original plans specified terra cotta trim around the doors and brick window sills, cast stone was used in actual construction.
2. Condition of fabric: The Store and Administration Building appears to be in good structural condition but is in need of maintenance and cosmetic attention.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The overall dimensions of the structure are as follows: first floor 271'-0" x 54'-0"; second floor 51'-6" x 54'-0"; basement 18'-2" x 34'-4". There is a 5 1/2" thick concrete roof slab.
2. Walls: Exterior walls are faced with four inches of selected common brick, bonded every fifth course and trimmed with cast stone.
3. Structural systems, framing: The floors and roof are of solid concrete slab construction and are supported by 12-inch exterior walls consisting of eight-inch load-bearing tile blocks and two rows of interior concrete columns spaced 18'-2" apart, connected by longitudinal concrete beams, as described by the National Register nomination.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorways are located on the northern facade, fronting Merritts Avenue, on the southern or rear side of the building, and on the western side, facing Techwood Drive. Three southern-facing doors open to a loading dock; another to the maintenance shop; and a double door leads into the stock room. On the Merritts Ave. side, a double door opens into an entry hall in the eastern third of the building, and a second double door provides access to tenant space in the building's western third. A double door is also located on the Techwood Drive side of the building. Door surrounds are of stone, and doors are metal.

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b. Windows: Windows punctuate the length of the building's eastern and southern sides and flank the Techwood Drive entrance. They are of metal, double-hung sash construction. Windows are defined by snap-in mullions. Transom lights run the length of the original store area.

5. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is a solid concrete slab 5 1/2" thick.

b. Eaves: There are no eaves.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The floor plan is longitudinal in orientation. It is of narrow transverse dimension and stair-steps down the grade west toward Techwood Drive.

2. Stairways: A stairway leads up to the second floor and down to the vault room in the basement from the entry hall in the eastern part of the building. The stairs are of concrete construction; the railings are of metal.

3. Flooring: Floors are of solid concrete slab construction.

4. Walls and ceilings: Walls and ceilings are of solid concrete construction. The entry hall is tiled.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Doors are of wood construction and are located on the northern, southern, and western sides.

b. Windows: Windows are of metal, double-hung sash construction and are located along the entire length of the eastern and southern sides of the building as well as framing the doorway on its western side.

6. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The original steam-generated boiler/ electric baseboard heating system was replaced with a gas-fired hot water circulation system in the 1980's. Steam was originally piped by Georgia Power Company.

b. Plumbing: All pipes were originally copper. Bathrooms are located in the eastern section of the building on both floors as well as in the western section of the building.

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D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building fronts on Merritts Ave. It is longitudinally oriented and stair-steps down the grade west toward Techwood Dr. Existing landscape elements include areas of grass and a line of trees along Techwood Drive and Merritts Avenue. A group of trees also exists east of the loading dock area. The building was originally accessible by Williams St. to the east and Techwood Dr. from the west until the construction of I-75/85 closed that segment of Williams.
2. Historic landscape design: It is believed that at least some of the existing trees are part of the original planting plan.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Several sets of drawings are available, including:

- original drawings
- drawings dated February 15, 1936
- Atlanta Housing Authority site plan, 1962
- comprehensive modernization drawings by Allain and Patterson, 1981

Photographs of selected examples of original drawings are included in this submittal, as follows: planting plan and plant list (photo # 12); plot plan and roof plan (photo # 13); floor plans and elevations (photo # 14); and details (photo # 15). Original drawings are housed at the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

B. Historic views:

Historic photographs are archived at the Atlanta History Center. A number of newspaper articles and other sources listed in Part III.C include historic views.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Atlanta Urban Design Commission, files.
Atlanta History Center, vertical files, newspapers, historic photographs.
Atlanta Housing Authority files.
Atlanta Preservation Center, file.

University of Georgia Hargrett Library, Athens, vertical files.

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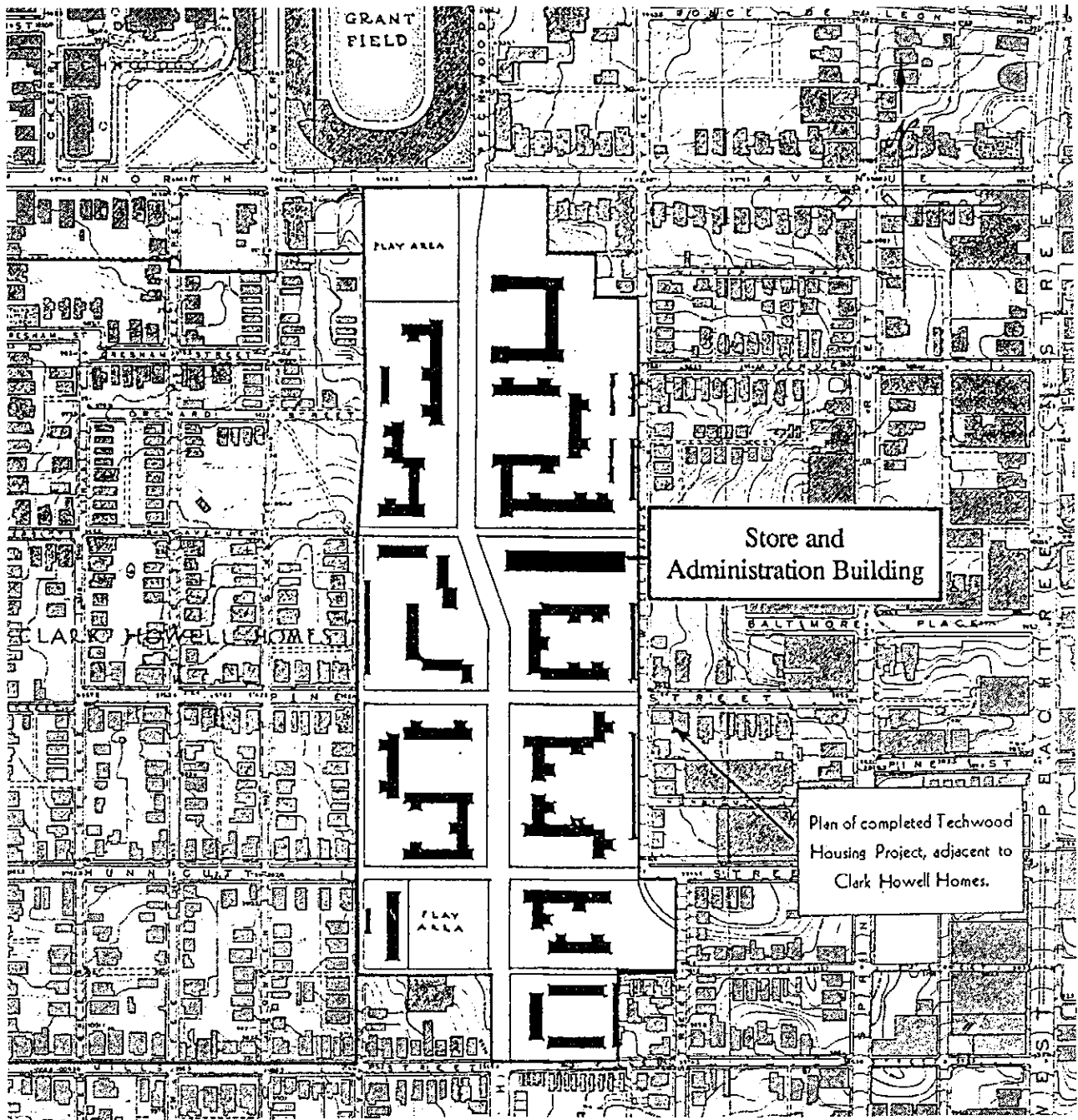
- D. Supplemental material: Following this outline format text are two 8 1/2" x 11" sketch drawings, as follows:
- historic site plan of Techwood Homes with the Store and Administration Building indicated
 - site plan of existing historic district with the Store and Administration Building indicated

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This HABS documentation packet is being prepared in compliance with a stipulation of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that addresses the impact of the Olympic Housing Impact Area on the Techwood Homes Historic District. The MOA is dated March 19, 1993. Parties to the MOA are: the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Board of Regents of the University System of the State of Georgia, and the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta.

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HISTORIC SITE PLAN OF TECHWOOD HOMES



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SITE PLAN OF TECHWOOD HOMES HISTORIC DISTRICT

